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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 006628

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH OFFICIALS TELL CODEL SHAYS THAT SECTARIAN  
VIOLENCE IN IRAQ THREATENS REGIONAL STABILITY

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11](#). (C) Summary: Senior Turkish officials and business leaders told CODEL Shays Nov. 29 that sectarian violence in Iraq threatens Turkey and the region. Events in Iraq are now threatening a centuries-old balance between Sunnis and Shia in the area, they asserted. Turkey continues to be concerned about the PKK's presence in northern Iraq and the Kirkuk issue. Turkish business leaders who work in Iraq are frustrated by the single border crossing; they accuse Barzani of collecting hundreds of millions in illicit fees from Turkish truckers. End summary.

[12](#). (C) A CODEL led by Rep. Christopher Shays (R-CT) and including House staff members met with GOT Special Iraq Envoy Celikkol, Deputy CHOD Saygun, and National Security Council Secretary-General Alpogan in Ankara on Nov. 29. CODEL Shays

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also held a working lunch with members of the Turkish Chambers of Commerce, and a series of meetings in Istanbul Nov. 27-28 with individual business leaders whose companies have worked in Iraq.

[13](#). (C) Rep. Shays led off his meetings by admitting to USG errors in Iraq. Swift de-Baathification and dissolution of the Iraqi military, combined with looting, got the U.S. off on a bad foot. Despite hopeful elections, successive Iraqi governments have been slow to form and even slower to act. It is time for the GOI to do the heavy lifting required to provide security and gain the confidence of the Iraqi people. The U.S. hopes Iraq's neighbors can assist with this process.

[14](#). (C) Saygun, Celikkol, and Alpogan all told Rep. Shays that sectarian violence in Iraq is worsening and the situation threatens both the fragile Iraqi government and a delicate Sunni/Shia balance in the region. All three claimed that Iran is now or will soon be the region's most powerful nation. Saygun asserted that Iran in fact seeks the breakup of Iraq, which Alpogan argued would be a disaster for the region.

[15](#). (C) Saygun pressed Shays on the PKK's continuing presence

in northern Iraq. He noted that the U.S. is seeking help from Turkey to stabilize Iraq, but asked what the U.S. is doing on the PKK issue. He highlighted the PKK's training camps just over the Iraqi border, and PKK activity beyond killing Turks, such as trafficking in drugs and people and tapping into oil pipelines to steal product. Shays agreed to take Turkey's concerns to the Hill and to Iraq (he visited Iraq for the fifteenth time in early December).

¶6. (C) Celikkol warned that sectarianism is leading to the "Lebanonization" of Iraq. He reviewed Turkey's efforts to reach out to Sunni Arabs in Iraq to draw them into the political process. He claimed that increasingly Iraq's Sunnis are persuaded that Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and Iran are the greatest threats to them (versus Coalition Forces), even though they see no real change in CF's attitudes toward them (detentions, etc.). Celikkol added that Turkey has worked hard to persuade the Sunnis that their domination of Iraq is a thing of the past, and that they must cooperate with the Shia-led government. However, Iraqi Islamic Party leader Hashimi has repeatedly complained to the Turks that the Shia and Kurds make all the decisions in the GOI; the Sunni Arab coalition members are never consulted. Celikkol said Iraqis and officials in neighboring states are concerned that SCIRI is increasingly, or entirely, under Iranian control. He admitted that Turkey has been surprised by the depth of sectarian divisions in Iraq.

¶7. (C) Celikkol emphasized that while an independent Kurdish state would be a concern for Turkey in the event of Iraq's disintegration, the GOT's main concern is that it and the region would have three countries with which to contend. An independent Sunni state, he asserted, would be "hard to handle." It would likely be under the sway of AQI, presenting the region with a terrorist threat much like

ANKARA 00006628 002 OF 003

Afghanistan prior to 9/11. A Shia state would upset the Shia-Sunni balance in the region.

¶8. (C) Celikkol outlined Turkey's frustration with the KRG, specifically Barzani's insistence with pushing ahead for a referendum by the end of 2007 to decide the future status of Kirkuk. He underscored that the Kirkuk issue is not only of concern to Turkey but to many Shia and Sunni Arabs in Iraq. He also expressed frustration with the PKK's continued presence in northern Iraq, but added that aside from these issues Turkey "has no problem" with increased political and economic interaction with Iraq's Kurds.

¶9. (C) Alpogan stressed that a unilateral U.S. withdrawal from Iraq would be "disastrous," and said that leaving Iraq in its current state, with terrorists holding sway, would call into question the USG's true commitment to the global war on terror. In response to Rep. Shays' question on how best to proceed, Alpogan said that continuing on the current path of training Iraqi security forces to assume responsibility for security in Iraq was job one. However, he urged the U.S. and the international community to step up those training efforts, providing more training, more equipment, and more indoctrination of Iraqi security forces. He also argued for a continued and concerted effort to inculcate Iraqi leaders with a greater degree of "national consciousness" to counter the efforts of those who want to rend the nation apart.

¶10. (C) Turkey has been working on this through political party training, according to Alpogan, and has open channels to all of Iraq's ethnic/religious groups to try to press them on maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity and the concept of the Iraqi nation. Alpogan repeated Saygun's charge that Iran is seeking the break-up of Iraq, noting that Moqtada al-Sadr and the Madhi army are almost entirely under the influence of Iran. He opined that Iraq is totally different from Vietnam saying, "this is not a national liberation struggle...the U.S. is not an occupying power."

¶11. (C) Alpogan said Iraqi PM Maliki is limited in what he can do. "He's a member of a coalition, not a miracle worker." However, he added, Maliki is "not a man of vision who can lead his country out of crisis." Alpogan also lamented the seeming indifference among Arab countries toward the situation in Iraq and their reluctance to provide more assistance to ensure it survives as one state. Responding to a question about the role Syria plays in destabilizing Iraq, Alpogan said one should not overestimate Syria's influence or ability to impact events in Iraq. He pointed to Iran and the "great fundamentalist threat coming from the East" as the greatest danger.

¶12. (C) At a luncheon hosted by the Turkish Chamber of Commerce equivalent organization (TOBB), business leaders said that security in Iraq is less of a problem than lack of information, widespread corruption, and other market inefficiencies (such as problems with insurance claims and money transfers) that stand in the way of the growth of trade with Turkey. Security is apparently less of a concern now that most Turkish trucks download their cargo to Iraqi trucks just over the border in Zakho. This is inefficient, however, especially since long backups on both sides of the border mean each truck can only make one journey to Iraq per month. The leaders complained that the KDP extracts exorbitant fees from Turkish truckers crossing into northern Iraq; their back-of-the-envelope calculation is that these fees amount to \$400 million annually, which they assert goes directly to Barzani. All emphasized the need to open additional border gates with Iraq, and called for other measures that would increase Iraq's trade as the best way to improve the quality of life for ordinary Iraqis. TOBB, for example, has proposed assisting in the strengthening of Iraqi chambers of commerce and industry and helping create stronger business networks in Turkey.

¶13. (U) CODEL Shays did not have an opportunity to clear this

ANKARA 00006628 003 OF 003

message.

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